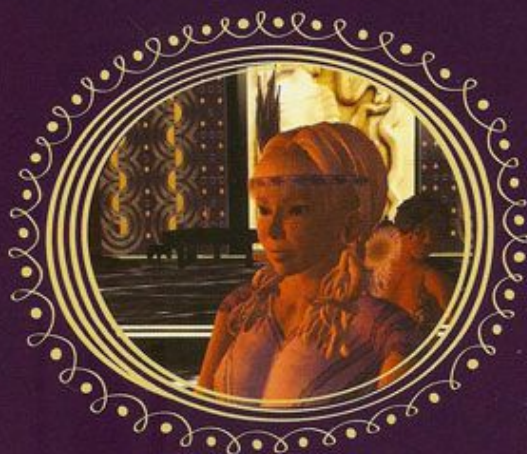


Aristasia: Where women live in the past

Zak Jane Keir takes a look at the Empire of Aristasia, a community of women who choose to live in a man-free world with no cultural artefacts beyond 1963.

In the Aristasian Empire, time is a place. Aristasia is an entirely female community, made up of women who live as if they exist in various periods of the early twentieth century, with no cultural artefacts from later than 1963. They may dress and act as if they are from the past, but their culture has a logic, mythology and language all its own.



The women of Aristasia

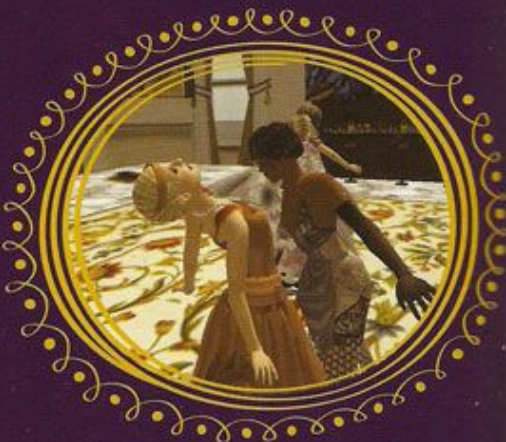
The Aristasian Empire as it exists today is divided into 'provinces', which correspond roughly to the decades of the 20th century: Quirinelle is like the 1950s, Kadoria the '40s, Trent the '30s and Vintesse, 'noted for its jinky music and its Pipsies' (the uninformed bongo can consult our Aristasian glossary), is like the 1920s. In Aristasia there are no men and no mention of them when you're 'inside' the Empire. However, there are still two definite sexes: blondes and brunettes, both feminine. An introductory article on the Aristasia website states that these two groups 'are mentally, physically, emotionally and psychologically different... the differences are greater rather than less than they superficially appear to be.' Brunettes are the more 'sturdy' and stereotypically masculine, whilst still certainly more feminine than your average modern woman, as the website explains: 'Aristasian brunettes are about as feminine as a normal human woman—that is to say, about twice as feminine as a human woman in the last quarter of the 20th century.'

while in contrast 'the emotions of a blonde are a surging torrent, her perspective often quite unworldly.'

Aristasia's beginnings

Confused? Think this all sounds too fantastical? A brief history lesson might illuminate things. The first Aristasians appear to have been a group of women who were students at Oxford University's Lady Margaret Hall. They began to build their subculture-cum-alternate world in the late 1970s, around the time that Lady Margaret Hall began accepting male students. These women were determined to reject, as far as possible, everything they despised about the late 20th century: fashion, cars, home furnishings, media and the rest. They dressed only in vintage clothing and furnished their homes out of antique shops,

disciplinary manual, The feminine regime and Children of the void. Copies of these books are now difficult to obtain, but they sold well in kink circles at the time



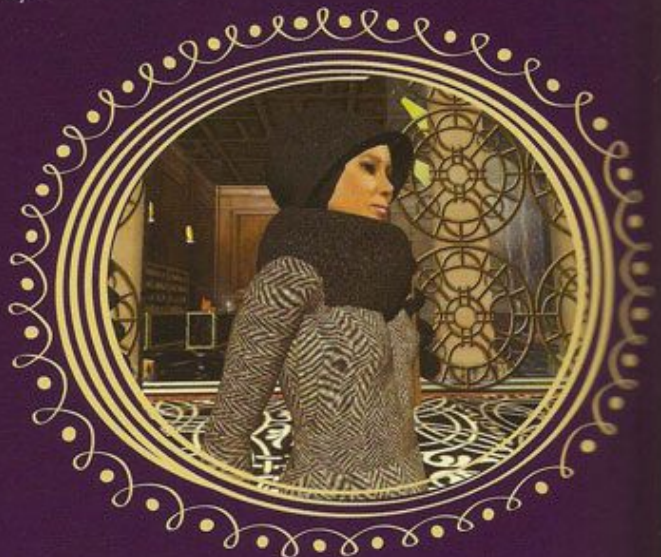
Many people might find this ladylike land of ladyness charming, yet still yearn for loud rock music, pints of lager, mobile phones and men.

junk shops and car boot sales. They began to evolve a complex religious philosophy of feminine essentialism and a unique way of seeing the world. This community that they originated is still a thriving though largely clandestine subculture to this day.

Silly Monkeys and media attention

Still not sure what to make of it all? Maybe a good spanking will help to make things clearer. The original Aristasians embraced the idea of discipline and corporal punishment as an essential part of everyday life, which led to them attracting media attention in the UK in the mid-1990s. They published several books, such as *The female*

of publication, despite frequently cited Aristasian disdain for what they referred to as Silly Monkeys (S&M practitioners). The Aristasian website advises prospective Aristasians who worry about the discipline



elements, 'Many girls find the healthy discipline, academic and otherwise, of elder sisters, schoolmistresses etc. to be a welcome addition to their lives... your problem would be much greater if discipline were your main interest in Aristasia. Aristasia... does not welcome girls who are just coming for discipline and such girls are, in any case, likely to be rather disappointed, as they will find that it is a very minor aspect of our lives.'

In 1995 a documentary, *A weekend at Miss Martindale's*, was filmed for the UK's Channel 4, and is now available on YouTube. Miss Marianne Martindale was then the public face of the Empire. Invited to participate in the making of the programme, I was able to spend some time in the only Aristasian household that ever allowed Tellurians — the polite Aristasian term for non-Aristasians — over the threshold. The then-Embassy was in Quirinelle, a 1950s-feeling household, down to the magazines on the coffee table. Music was played on a real wind-up gramophone, and 'film screenings' were videotapes of old films played on an adapted vintage television set. Though never allowed the chance to visit a Vintesse household, I am sure it would have been the same mix of authentic clothes and décor with unavoidable modern appliances being either hidden, disguised or renamed.

Elektraspace and Second Lives

For a group that rejects modern life, the Aristasian Empire has enthusiastically embraced a lot of modern technology, especially the Internet: there was an Aristasian website as early as 1994. I queried this during one visit to Miss Martindale's household, and was informed that Aristasians felt fully entitled to make use of computers — which she referred to as ordinator — because they would still have come to exist even if *The Eclipse* (how Aristasians describe what they consider the cultural end of the world: 1963) had not occurred. 'They are the inherited merits of civilisation... the fruits of that culture which we preserve and [modern day non-Aristasians] destroy,' says the Aristasian book, *Children of the Void*.

Indeed, Aristasia's involvement with the Internet has helped its popularity. It's perhaps unsurprising that *Second Life* has proved so popular with those who find Aristasia attractive. For many people the idea of fitting out your entire wardrobe and whole house from vintage shops and

rejecting as much as possible all contact with non-Aristasians would be impossible, whereas anyone with access to an, ahem, ordinator with broadband can be an online Aristasian in fully fashioned stockings, with an Art Deco home.

This is probably a somewhat healthier option for those whose interest in all-female environments, elegance and feminine mysticism is more on the level of fun and curiosity than an all-consuming

desire to escape the present-day world. Many people might find this ladylike land of ladyness charming, yet still yearn for loud rock music, pints of lager, mobile phones and men.

Withdrawal from society

More recent years have seen somewhat of an upheaval in the real-world Aristasia, though. During the 1990s and the first few years of the 21st century, Miss Martindale and her Aristasian Embassy maintained

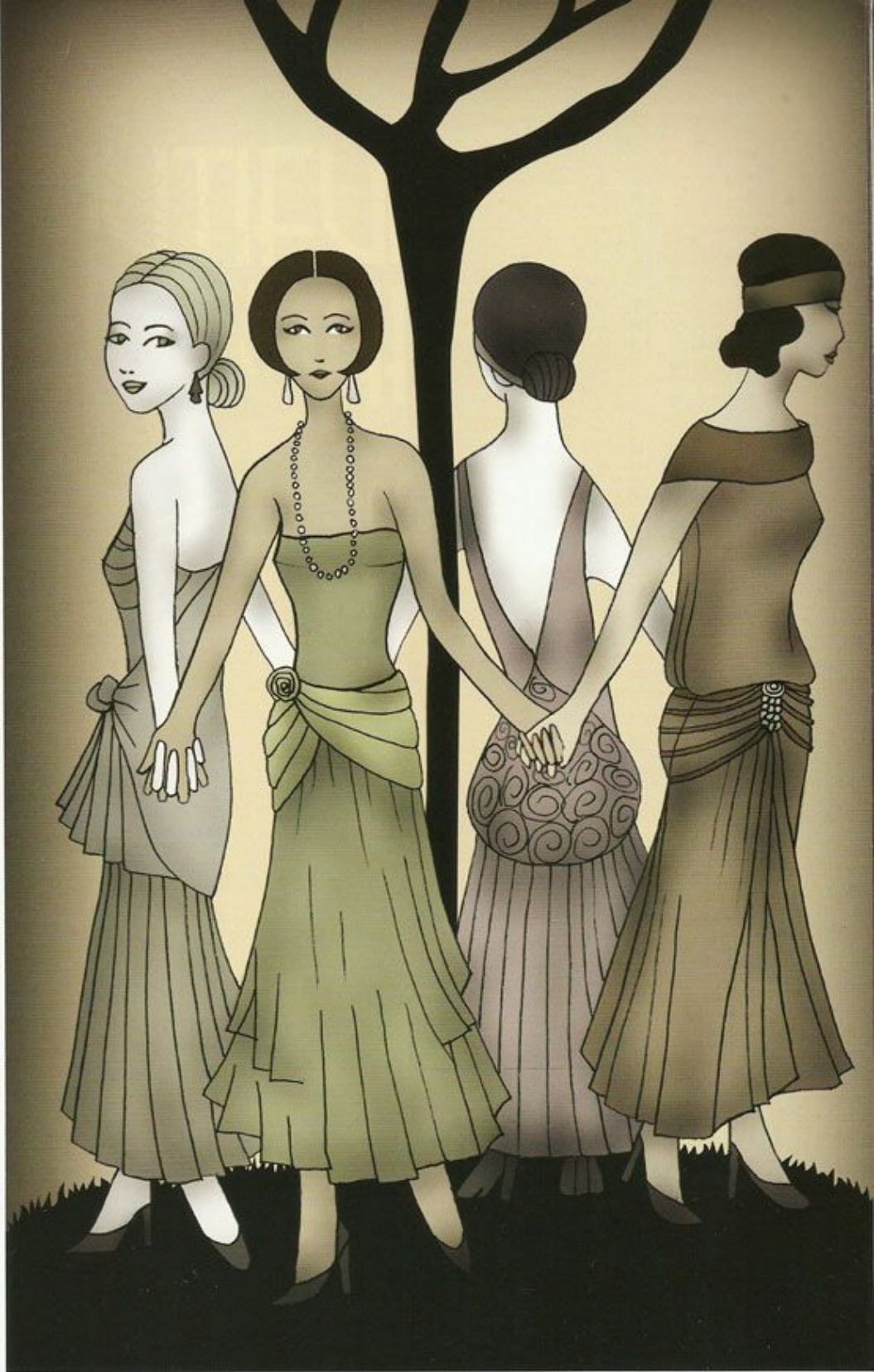


Illustration Hayley O'Connor

Aristasian Lexicon

Eclipse, the: The cultural and spiritual collapse of the early 1960s. Tellurian civilisation proper ended at this time and the Void (or the Pit) took its place.

Pit, the: The world of the late 20th century and beyond. The 'current world' of Western post-civilisation outside Aristasia. The psychotic de-feminised pseudo-reality created by *The Eclipse*.

Racination: The reverse of deracination. It is the process (or rather processes) by which to undo the damage that The Pit has done and regain our stolen innocence and revive our trampled joy and wonder.

Bongo: A dweller in the Pit, particularly one deeply affected by the ethos of the Pit.

Ordie: An ordinator; a computer.

Elektraspace: the Internet.

Virtualia: Typically used to refer to Aristasia's Second Life presence, although it can mean any online form of the Empire.

Physicalia: Physical life, as opposed to Virtual Reality.

Real: Authentic, not mutated by the Pit. Real cars and real films are what bongos would call old cars and old films.

Up-to-date/Out-of-date: Up-to-date refers to things (music, technology) in keeping with the pre-Eclipse era being evoked. 'Out of date' refers to the degenerate artefacts of the Pit.

Hyacinth: To 'give someone the hyacinth' is to refuse to speak to her.

Gerbil: To gerbil someone is to steal someone's drink.

Jinky: Frivolous, jaunty, gay. Applied to people, activities, music

Pette: A girl, particularly of the jaunty and ultra-feminine sort.

Pippsy: A bright young thing.

Silly Monkey: Used to refer to S/M practitioners, particularly those with a misguided interest in Aristasian discipline.

For a full Aristasian glossary, see Aristasia.co.uk.



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an easily-contactable presence in the real world. There was a social club called Girls' Town and anyone who was tempted to explore Aristasia could go there, or get in touch via letter or email. However, at some point in 2005, a radical change took place, known as Operation Bridgehead: the Aristasians withdrew from the rest of the contemporary world and most, if not all, of the original group left England altogether for the US.

Aristasian households still exist, but are now far more secretive and inaccessible to the curious outsider. It is strongly implied that if you are someone with true Aristasian spirit, you will progress through various unspecified levels to the point where you can detach yourself from the rest of the world. This is not pushed as necessary for everyone who wants to dip a toe into Empire waters.

This mystery and exclusivity seem to have worked in the Aristasians' favour; there now appear to be several hundred women in 'the Outer Circle': having an Aristasian online

identity and a definite interest in exploring Aristasian philosophy and lifestyle. As to exactly how many fully seceded households there are, direct questions have always tended to be met with smiling distraction techniques, or ignored.

To the uninitiated, holding a conversation with a true Aristasian is ultimately ever-so-slightly mind-bending. Their way of seeing the world is genuinely different. There are aspects of both radical separatist feminism – a belief that the male-created world is all wrong and men are the source of all evil – and a goddess-worshipping religiosity among the deep-level devotees. Those who insist that 'Real' Aristasia, where magic is a part of life and blondes and brunettes really are separate sexes that can breed together, exists on another plane, sound like absolute nuts. Others acknowledge that to them, really, it's all just a big role-play game. ■

Zak Jane Keir has been writing about sex and human interaction from a non-mainstream viewpoint for over 20 years. She also does Morris Dancing so tends not to call other people weird.